

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE
OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN**

Rep. Paul Opsommer, Chairman
LANSING, MICHIGAN APRIL 25, 2012

Chairman Opsommer and Committee members,

I also thank you for the opportunity to address you. There will be no long sermon today. I trust you will find my comments to be brief, to the point, instructive, and maybe a bit inspirational. I cannot claim to be aware of all the dimensions of your deliberations and discussions on HB 4434, but I suspect they will not be difficult or lengthy. But then I am not in your shoes.

It is honoring and humbling for me to speak to you in support of HB 4434.

I am also honored and humbled to speak on behalf of the many community based non-profit hospice organizations, to advocate for the concept and principles of Hospice care but most of all I am honored and humbled to speak for the patients and families that receive comfort care in their time of need.

Barring a sudden death, we will all hear some day the unwelcome news of a terminal diagnosis. We will all walk through the valley of the shadow of death, to use an image from my discipline of spiritual care. I have no doubt many of you have already walked in that valley with a family member or friend. It is a life and spirit shaping experience.

When the news of terminal illness falls from the lips of a physician or jumps from a text of a medical report, many troubling questions form in the hearts and minds of a patient. Chief among them is

How much will I suffer?

Who will care for me? For my family?

Will I suffer among unconcerned and impersonal strangers in a nursing home?

Will I die in a remote room on a forgotten wing of a hospital?

Or will a community of caring family members and medical professionals be there to ease my pain, to walk me home?

I've cried, counseled, and prayed with many patients and their families as they try to grasp the news and wrestle with these questions and the emotional, family, and spiritual issues that follow.

Patients like Ken.....

lived in a one room apartment in one of the smaller towns in Shiawassee County

His terminal conditions were numerous and dramatic

no family no financial resources sky pilot story.

We were able to care for him in a designated Hospice room at Memorial

Healthcare, a room which has since been remodeled. A portion of his costs were covered by our Friends of Hospice Foundation.

Patients like Don.....

a wealthy and well known medical professional in our community.

We enabled his wife and others to care for him at home, where he wanted to be.

I was privileged to help him renew the Christian faith of his youth, to baptize him at his home one week before he passed, and to lead the celebration of his life and colorful personality.

In both of these cases and in many others excellent care was provided, suffering was eased, love for a community member became tangible in their time of need. Our only regrets with many of the patients we care for is that the community of caring is invited in so late in their struggle. The previous speaker highlighted the reality that in Michigan Hospice care tends to begin weeks or months after the need is present. Physicians and families avoid the discussion for their own reasons while patients suffer needlessly.

The dedicated professionals of the hospice community of caring are eager and ready to walk our friends and neighbors through the final journey, the last chapter of life.

I am blessed to be part of such a community of caring

.....in my work with Hospice of Memorial Healthcare in Owosso, MI
doubled in size in the last year. Still not as big as those in larger communities

The word is out that the staff of Memorial Hospice will do everything we can to meet the comfort care, social work, volunteer support, and spiritual needs of our patients and their families.

Scrambling to keep up Adding staff as we are able.

As Hospice caregivers working in a local community non-profit setting, we are blessed and challenged to serve our neighbors, our friends, and sometimes the family members of one of our own staff members with the best care.

.....through the recently established Hospice House of Shiawassee County. This non-profit effort, which is independent of Memorial Healthcare, has opened a three bed home of mercy, compassion, and care, where families, volunteers and medical professionals come together to be a community of caring in a time of need. Similar Hospice houses have been established in other communities. More are needed.

I will leave you with one key thought as you consider the proposal before you.

The health of communities should be measured not only by their economic strength or their place in history or their cultural contribution or their religious institutions and traditions but by their ability to care for every citizen from their first breath to their final one, from their first heartbeat to their last. Hospice caregiving needs to join the journey through the valley of the shadow of death sooner. Not one family I have worked with has not expressed that regret when the end came.

I encourage you to support HB4434 not only with your vote of affirmation but with your enthusiasm for and genuine understanding of hospice care. Hospice care needs to expand in scope and acceptance across this great state and HB 4434 will move us in that direction.

Thank you for your time.

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